



## THE FIVE BAD MEGATHEMES IN AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

TO: LEGISLATORS

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The Barna Research Group is a leading and respected Evangelical pollster in America. In 2010 they conducted a national study on current trends in American Evangelicalism that I think you, as a national leader, should ponder. Accordingly, this week's notes are not so much a Bible study as they are a primer as to why your personal, regular commitment to Bible study is absolutely necessary.

What follows is both shocking and alarming. It is also personal; don't analyze what follows in the third person. Are you a part of these trends or are you a counter to these trends?

You need to be committed to Bible study every week. How and where you spend your time says a lot about your inner heart. Some of you in the capitol need a good kick in the butt because what follows is precisely descriptive of you! Hear ye the voice of the Lord. Revive your heart for Christ today! Seek first His Kingdom!

What can help to turn these bad trends around are national public servants who name the name of Christ modeling in their heart just the opposite!

## WEEKLY MEMBERS BIBLE STUDY

WEDNESDAY MORNINGS 7:45 to 8:45 AM

Hot Breakfast Served • Capitol Family Room H324 • Spouses Welcome

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**INTRODUCTION**

What follows is an analysis of insights drawn from more than 5,000 non-proprietary interviews conducted over an eleven-month period in 2010. George Barna indicated that the following patterns were evident in the survey findings. Much of what follows is quoted from his summations.

**I. THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IS BECOMING LESS THEOLOGICALLY LITERATE**

What used to be basic, universally known truths about Christianity are now unknown mysteries to a large and growing share of Americans – especially young adults. For instance, Barna Group studies in 2010 showed that while most people regard Easter as a religious holiday, only a minority of adults associates Easter with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Other examples include the finding that few adults believe that their faith is meant to be the focal point of their life or to be integrated into every aspect of their existence.

Further, a growing majority believe that the Holy Spirit is a symbol of God's presence or power, but not a living entity.

As the two younger generations (Busters and Mosaics) ascend to numerical and positional supremacy in churches across the nation, these data suggest that our nation's biblical literacy is likely to decline significantly.

The theological free-for-all that is encroaching on Protestant churches nationwide suggests that the coming decade will be a time of unparalleled theological diversity and inconsistency.

As an elected official you need to continually work on your biblical literacy. I am here to help you. Just let me know if you feel totally deficient here; I can help you privately.

**II. CHRISTIANS ARE BECOMING MORE INGROWN AND LESS OUTREACH ORIENTED**

Despite technological advances that make communications instant and far-reaching, Christians are becoming more spiritually isolated from non-Christians than was true a decade ago.

Examples of this tendency include the following: less than one-third of born again Christians planned to invite anyone to join them at a church event during the Easter season; teenagers are less inclined to discuss Christianity with their friends than was true in the past; most of the people who become Christians these days do so in response to a personal crisis or the fear of death (particularly among older Americans); and most Americans are unimpressed with the contributions that Christians and Christian churches have made to society over the past few years.

As young adults have children, the prospect of them seeking a Christian church is diminishing – especially given the absence of faith talk in their conversations with the people they most trust.

With atheists becoming more strategic in championing their godless worldview, not to mention the greater religious plurality driven by education and immigration, the increasing reticence of Christians to engage in faith-oriented conversations assumes heightened significance.

**WE ARE BEGINNING TO PLAN FOR THE FALL A MEMBERS EVANGELISTIC OUTREACH DINNER HERE IN THE CAPITOL WITH SOME SPECIAL SPEAKERS AND MUSIC**

Will you help to give leadership to this? The capitol community will change to the degree we get out of our shell and evangelize the lost. The real – the base problem here – is that so many people are



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spiritually dead. Your elocution of biblically based principles for public policy falls largely on deafness.

**III. GROWING NUMBERS OF PEOPLE ARE LESS INTERESTED IN SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES AND MORE DESIROUS OF LEARNING PRAGMATIC SOLUTIONS FOR LIFE**

When asked what matters most, teenagers prioritize education, career development, friendships and travel. Faith is significant to them, but it takes a back seat to life accomplishments and is not necessarily perceived to affect their ability to achieve their dreams.

**AMONG ADULTS THE AREAS OF GROWING IMPORTANCE ARE LIFESTYLE COMFORT, SUCCESS, AND PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENTS**

Those dimensions have risen at the expense of investment in both faith and family. The turbo-charged pace of society leaves people with little time for reflection. The deeper thinking that occurs typically relates to economic concerns or relational pressures. Spiritual practices like contemplation, solitude, silence, and simplicity are rare. (It is ironic that more than four out of five adults claim to live a simple life).

Practical to a fault, Americans consider survival in the present to be much more significant than eternal security and spiritual possibilities. Because we continue to separate our spirituality from other dimensions of life through compartmentalization, a relatively superficial approach to faith has become a central means of optimizing our life experience.

**IV. THE POSTMODERN INSISTENCE ON TOLERANCE IS WINNING OVER THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

Biblical illiteracy and lack of spiritual confidence has caused most Americans to avoid making discerning choices for fear of being labeled judgmental. The result is a Church that has become tolerant of a vast array of morally and spiritually dubious behaviors and philosophies. This increased leniency makes possible the very limited accountability that we often find within the body of Christ. There are fewer and fewer issues that Christians believe churches should be dogmatic about. The idea of love has been redefined to mean the absence of conflict and confrontation, as if there are no moral absolutes that are worth fighting for. That may not be surprising in a Church in which a minority believes that there are moral absolutes dictated by the Scriptures.

The challenge today is for Christian leaders to achieve the delicate balance between representing truth and acting in love. The challenge for every Christian in the U.S. is to know his/her faith well enough to understand which fights are worth fighting, and which stands are non-negotiable. There is a place for tolerance in Christianity; knowing when and where to draw the line appears to perplex a growing proportion of Christians in this age of tolerance.

**V. THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON CULTURE AND ON INDIVIDUAL LIVES IS LARGELY INVISIBLE**

Christianity has arguably added more value to American culture than any other religion, philosophy, ideology or community of thought. Yet contemporary Americans are hard pressed to identify any specific added value. Partly due to the nature of today's media, they have no problem identifying the faults of the churches and Christian people.

In a period of history where image is reality, and life-changing decisions are made on the basis of such images, the Christian Church is in desperate



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need of a more positive and accessible image. The primary obstacle is not the substance of the principles on which Christianity is based, and therefore the solution is not solely providing an increase in preaching or public relations. The most influential aspect of Christianity in America is now what believers do – or do not do – to implement their faith in public and in private.

American culture is driven by the snap judgments and decisions that people make amidst busy schedules and with incomplete information. With little time or energy available for or devoted to research and reflection, people's impressions of and interest in Christianity are substantially shaped by their observations of the integration of a believer's faith into how he/she responds to life's opportunities and challenges. Jesus frequently spoke about the importance of the fruit that emerges from a Christian life; these days the pace of life and the avalanche of competing ideas underscores the significance of visible spiritual fruit as a source of cultural influence.

With the likelihood of an accelerating pace of life and increasingly incomplete cues being given to the population, Christian leaders would do well to revisit the criteria for "success" and the measures used to assess it. In a society where choice is king, there are no absolutes, and every individual is a free agent, we are taught to be self-reliant and independent, and Christianity is no longer the automatic, default faith of young adults.

**NEW WAYS OF RELATING TO  
AMERICANS AND EXPOSING THEIR  
HEART AND SOUL TO THE CHRISTIAN  
FAITH ARE REQUIRED**

One way in which the believers in the nation's capitol can work to create new mediums for effective Gospel communication is to use their influence and relationships to open doors into the 3,000 county buildings and 30,000 city halls across America in order to partner with biblically-solid

churches to found and build lay ministries of evangelism, discipleship and Bible study with public servants in local government. Statistics indicate, and you know from experience, that the dominant majority of tomorrow's leaders will begin their political journey in local government. If you are willing to lend your influence, we can leverage that influence in this people group to found new Members Bible studies in local government, which will create new strategic ministries in the halls of city and county buildings to reach tomorrow's leaders with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is very doable if we team together with local churches!

Here at Capitol Ministries we refer to this as Phase III of our national ministry plan: Phase I is 50 ministries in 50 capitols. Phase II is our in-depth disciple-making ministry here in DC and Phase III is ominous and huge: Ministries in the 3,000 county and 30,000 city halls! This is an impossible feat for any organization, but if God empowers our plans and our partnership it can happen!

### **CONCLUSION**

As a national public servant perhaps your best way to participate to help turn the tide of these five bad megatrends is to first make sure they are not descriptive of yourself.

Secondly, use your influence to help us start new ministries in local city and county governments in partnership with local churches. We will be talking more about how we can partner together on this initiative in the days ahead.